Mark Manolopoulos

With Gifted Thinkers

Conversations with Caputo, Hart, Horner, Kearney, Keller, Rigby, Taylor, Wallace, Westphal

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Faith in Hermeneutics: With Richard Kearney

MM: In the Derrida-Marion debate 'On the Gift' (Villanova, 1997) you ask the question: 'Is there a Christian philosophy of the gift?'[1] Do you think either Derrida or Marion or both provide handy directions? Could you summarize or interpret their insights? And whose argument do you find more persuasive?

RK: They did avoid the question. In Derrida's case that is logical because he will always – reasonably for a deconstructionist – try to avoid tying the messianicity of the gift to any messianism as such, be it Christian, Jewish, Islamic, or any other kind. So it makes sense for him not to engage in that debate *per se* because he would say: 'That's beyond my competence. I'm not a Christian. 'I rightly pass for an atheist.' I respect Christianity. I'm fascinated by their theological and philosophical expressions of the notion of the gift – I learn from it – but it's not my thing.'[2] Marion I find a little bit more perplexing in this regard because he *is* a Christian philosopher. He has talked about 'eucharistic hermeneutics' in *God Without Being.*[3] Christ is a 'saturated phenomenon' for Marion.[4] But Marion is going through a phase – and this was evident at the Villanova conference – where he doesn't want to be labeled as a 'Christian philosopher' – and certainly *not* as a Christian *theologian.* He wants to be a phenomenologist. So, being true – at least to some extent – to Husserl's phenomenology as a universal science, he wants to be inde-

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1 Derrida and Marion, 'On the Gift', 61.

2 The phrase 'I quite rightly pass for an atheist' appears in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 154. Of course, there is a certain undecidability in the phrase 'pass for' – which can denote feigning; note the OED's definition: 'to be accepted as equivalent; to be taken for; to be accepted, received, or held in repute as. *Often with the implication of being something else*' (emphasis added).

3 Marion, *God Without Being.*

4 On Marion's notion of the saturated phenomenon, refer to 'The Saturated Phenomenon', trans. Thomas A. Carlson, in *Philosophy Today* 40 (1996): 103-124 [henceforth Marion, 'The Saturated Phenomenon'], as well as *In Excess.*

pendent of presuppositions regarding this or that particular theological revelation: Christian, Jewish, or otherwise. I think that's why in his essays on 'the saturated phenomenon', Marion goes back to Kant. The Kantian sublime offers a way into the saturated phenomenon, as does the notion of the gift or donation, which – like Husserlian phenomenology – precedes the question of theological confessions and denominations. And I think Marion wants to retreat to that position so that he won't be labeled a Christian apologist – which I think he is. I think he's a Christian theologian who's trying not to be one. Personally, my own response here would be to say that there's two ways of doing phenomenology – and both are equally valid. One is to begin with certain theological and religious presuppositions. The other is to operate a theological reduction, where you say: 'We're not going to raise theological issues here.' That's following the basic Husserlian and Heideggerian line. In the *Introduction to Metaphysics,* Heidegger says something like: 'The answer to the question 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' – if you fail to bracket out theology – is: because God created the world.'[5] But if you bracket it out, you don't begin with theological presuppositions – and that is what Husserl does, what Heidegger does, and what Derrida does. I think Marion mixes the two, although, in the exchange with Derrida, I think he's trying to get back to that kind of *pure* phenomenology. He keeps saying: 'I'm a phenomenologist! I'm doing phenomenology!' But the lady doth protest too much. Then there is the other way of doing phenomenology *in dialogue with* theology, which doesn't bracket it out but *half*-suspends it. We might call this a quasi-theological phenomenology or a quasi-phenomenological theology. In other words, one acknowledges that there's a certain hybridity, but one doesn't want to presuppose straight off which comes *first:* the giving of the gift as a phenomenological event or the divine creation of the world as source of all gifts. This allows for a certain ambiguous intermeshing, intermixing, crossweaving – what Merleau-Ponty described as a chiasmic interlacing.[6] And it seems to me that that's perfectly legitimate. Even though it is methodologically more complex and more ambivalent than the Husserlian move of saying 'Bracket out all political, theological, ideological, cultural presuppositions', it is actually truer to life because life *is* the natural attitude. And the natural attitude *is* infused with presuppositions. And it includes *both* (a) experiences of the gift as pure gift; and, (b) experiences of the gift for believers as coming from Yahweh or Christ or Allah or the Sun God/dess. And it seems to me that the phenomenology of unbracketed experience, the phenomenology of the natural attitude – which I think Merleau-Ponty gets pretty close to – is what I am practicing in *The God Who May Be.* I'm not writing as a theologian because I don't have the theological competence. I'm writing as a philosopher, but one who, as a philosopher, feels quite entitled to draw from religious scriptures as sources, just as theologians do, and to draw from phenomenology as a method. I'll draw from anything that will help me clarify the question. And I think by drawing ambidextrously from both, it can open a 'middle path' into some interesting questions, even though the Husserlians and the Heideggerians can shout: 'Foul! You're bringing the religious into this!' and the theologians can say: 'Oh, well, you're not a theologian! Did you pass your doctoral exam in dogmatic theology?!' And I just say: 'No. I'm just doing a hermeneutic readings of texts – some phenomenological, some religious – and I'm going to mix them. If there be interference, let it be a creative interference. If there be contamination, let it be a fruitful contamination.'

MM: In the Villanova exchange, Derrida wouldn't provide a theology of the gift, and Marion doesn't. If you provided a theology of the gift, what would be some characteristics or axioms?

RK: Well, I repeat, what I'm doing in *The God Who May Be* is not theology as such but a 'hermeneutics of religion'. It is, I hope, a contribution to the phenomenology of the gift. I usually call 'the gift' by other names: (1) the 'transfiguring' God, (2) the 'desiring' God, (3) the 'possibilizing' God, (4) the 'poeticizing' God – the creating God (qua *poesis*). They would be my four categories of gifting. *Poesis* or the poeticizing God engages in a co-creation with us. God can't create the kingdom unless we create the space for the kingdom to come.

5 Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics,* trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

6 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and Invisible,* trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 266.

MM: That's interesting in light of Catherine Keller's thesis that creation *ex nihilo* is too one-way.[7]

RK: What I like about the *creatio ex nihilo* – though I can see that it's non-reciprocal – is that it's an unconditional giving. It's not a giving because there's some problem to be solved that precedes the giving. To use Derrida's language, it comes before economy although it cannot continue without economy. As soon as there's history and finitude and humanity, there's economy, there's negotiation. And there is, to my mind, reciprocity. Here I disagree with Caputo, Derrida and Lyotard and the postmodern deconstructionists who repudiate the notion of reciprocity or equity or reconciliation. They see it as going back to Hegel or conceding to some kind of economy. I don't think it is as simple as that. I am wary of the polarity between the absolutely-unconditional-gift *versus* the gift-as-compromised-by-the-economy (which gets rid of the gift as pure gift). I just think that's an unhelpful dichotomy, as I think messianicity *versus* messianism is an unhelpful dichotomy. It's an interesting idea; it's good for an argument. But I think it's ultimately unworkable because I don't think you can investigate messianicity without messianism; and I don't think you can have genuine messianism without messianicity. Now, maybe Derrida would agree with that. But there's still a difference of emphasis. I don't see anything wrong with the mix. Whereas Derrida seems to think it is all that is *possible* for us human, mortal beings, what he's really interested in is the *impossible.* I leave the impossible to God, and get on with the possible. Because that's where I find myself: I'm in the economic order. I look to something called 'God' – what Derrida calls 'the impossible' – to guarantee that the economy doesn't close in on itself. But I don't hold out God as something that we should even entertain as an option for us because God is not an option for us. God is an option for God. Humanity is an option for us. If we can be more human, that's our business. Our business is not to become God. It's God's vocation to become more fully God, ours to become more fully human. We answer to the Other without ever *fusing* in some kind of metaphysical unity or identity. When I say 'I'm for reciprocity, equity and reconciliation', I'm not for premature Hegelian synthesis. I'm not for metaphysical appropriation or some ineluctable evolving 'process' of integration. I'm not for reducing the otherness of God to being as such. But, on the other hand, and this may sound paradoxical, I'm all for *traversings* of one by the other – anything that muddies the waters and makes the borders between God and us porous. I don't believe there's an absolute God out there and then a completely compromised humanity here. I think there are constant *to-ings* and *fro-ings.* So the phenomenology of the gift that I'm trying to articulate in terms of poeticizing, is a co-creation of history by humanity and God, leading to the kingdom. A new heaven and a new earth. We don't know what that will be because we haven't reached it. We can imagine but we can't pronounce. It goes beyond the sphere of the phenomenology of history because it involves a post-historical situation. It's an *eschaton.* We can imagine it as an eschatology but it's really something that God knows more about than we do.

MM: What do you mean when you say 'giving is desiring'?

RK: I argue that giving is desiring because desire is not just the movement from lack to fulfillment, or from potency to act, or from the insufficient to the sufficient – these are metaphysical notions of desire. I'm taking the idea of desire as coming from a fullness towards an absence as much as coming from an absence to a fullness. For example, *kenosis* is a form of desire. And it doesn't come from God being empty and wanting to become full. It comes from God being full and wanting to empty His [*sic*] divinity in order to be more fully in dialogue with the human because, as Lévinas says: *On s'amuse mieux à deux.* 'It's better to be two than one'. And it's 'better' in the sense of being *more* good, *more* just, *more* loving. It's Eckhart's idea of *ebullutio,* this 'bubbling over', this excess or surplus of desire. Not a surplus of being but of desire. Desire is always the desire of more desire.[8] And also the desire for an answer: what's the point in God desiring and having nobody to answer the divine desire? That's why Song of Songs says it all: the desire of the Shulamite woman – representing humanity – for the Lord (Solomon the lover) is a desire that actually expresses itself not just as frustration, emptiness, lack, looking for her lover, but as a desire that sings its encounter with the lover that celebrates its *being found.* In the Song of

7 Refer to Keller, *Face of the Deep.*

8 Mark C. Taylor poignantly remarks: '*Desire desires desire.*' Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 147.

Songs, the lover *finds* the Shulamite woman and that is the inaugura moment, as it were, of the song of desire. It's a desire based not on *fin amor* and romantic passion – which is frustration, prohibition, or absenc It's a desire of plenitude – not of presence, because that's fusional. It's desire of excess – not of deficiency. A desire that stems from being take by God. A response to the desire of the absolute. So that's another for of giving. In other words, the desire of the Shulamite woman is a gift It's not a subjective hankering. It's a gift; it's a response to a gift. An what's the gift? The gift is desire. So you've got two desires at work The traditional view has been to consider the human as desiring the full ness of God because the human is full of lack, insufficiency, and finitud But what I'm trying to do is to see it as much more complex than that It's a question of both lack *and* fullness in God and humanity. There's lack in God and there's a lack in humanity. What's the lack in humanity? It's that humanity is not divine. What's the lack in God? God is *not* hu man. So, in a way, the kingdom as a second coming or incarnation i what we're looking for. But as soon as you have that meeting of the fi nite and the infinite you've left history behind – not to return to som kind of fusion or 'oceanic oneness' *à la* Freud. Let's imagine it herme neutically, poetically: what would the kingdom be if the desire of th Shulamite woman and the desire of the Lover Lord were to meet an mesh in a post-historical fashion? The first answer is: we don't know But if we were to imagine it – as various religions have done – it woul be a dance; it would be a *perichoresis*. It would be the dance-around o the three persons or of the two lovers and, arguably, where there is tw there is always a third. So the *perichoresis* is the refusal – even in *parou sia* and *pleroma*, and eschatology and even in the kingdom – t compromise in terms of a closed economy. It never closes. The economy is still bubbling, is still flowering, is still bursting into life and being b virtue of this dance-around which, as *perichoresis*, is something I ex plore in *The God Who May Be*. The *perichoresis* is the dance-around th *khôra*. *Peri-chora*. The dance-around is each person of the Trinity – whether you interpret that as Father-Son-Holy Ghost, or God-humanity kingdom (one doesn't have to be patriarchal and gender-exclusive on this in dialogue with each other. We're just fantasizing here – which o course most theologians wouldn't allow us to do. They would say: 'Wel now, is that according to Saint Thomas or Saint Augustine, etc?' At cer tain points in history if you said something like Bruno of Nola, or ever

Eckhart, you could be burnt for it. But let's assume we're not going to be burnt in this day and age for imagining what might go on in the kingdom. Now, in terms of this desiring relationship with the three persons, there's a double movement that I'm arguing will or *could* continue – let's imagine – in the kingdom when history has ended as we know it and when the Shulamite woman who desires God has come face-to-face with her lover. The double movement is this: it's a movement of approach and of distance. The term *perichoresis* is translated into Latin as *circum-incessio,* which is taken from two phonetically similar verbs: (a) *cedo,* 'to leave place', 'to absent yourself'; and, (b) *sedo,* meaning 'to sit', 'to assume or take up a position'. So there is a double movement of immanence and transcendence; of distantiation and approximation. Of moving *towards* each other and then moving *away* from each other – as in a dance. A dance-around where each person cedes his/her place to the other and then that other to its other and so on. So it's not just two persons. There's a third person in this divine dance who you're always acknowledging and invoking. This third person is very important in Lévinas and I think it's very important in certain Christian notions of the Trinity. Because the danger of two is that two can become one; face-to-face can become a candlelit dinner, where romantic lovers look into each other's eyes and see themselves reflected in the other. Whereas the third introduces a little bit of 'symbolic castration' that safeguards a certain distance and therefore allows for desire. If desire were to reach its end it would end. And a God who is not desiring is a God who's not giving. And a God who is not giving is not God.

MM: What about the 'transfiguring God'?

RK: The transfiguring God is the God who transfigures us; we transfigure God. The other example I use is Mount Tabor. Basically, God transfigures us through creation, through interventions in history – whether it's the burning bush or Christ or the saints or the epiphanies that Joyce and Proust talk about: *that,* to me, is the divine transfiguring the everyday. So presumably if God is giving, God is giving as a constant process and practice of transfiguring. We may not see it. We may not know that it's there. And we may refuse to acknowledge it, in which case it doesn't affect our lives. In a way, that's God's loss, too, because if God's transfiguring goes unheeded and unheard, we're going to have

wars, evil, and so on. I'm Augustinian in that regard: evil is the *absence* of God as transfiguring, desiring, poeticizing, and possibilizing – I'll come back to this fourth category in a moment. But transfiguring is not just something God does to us: it's also something that we do to God. And we transfigure God to the extent that we create art, we create justice, we create love. We bring into being, through our actions – poetical and ethical – a transfiguration of the world. It's a human task as much as a divine gift. God gives to us a transfiguring promise; we give back to God a transfigured world – and we can transfigure it in ways that God can't. We can author a poem like a Shakespearean Sonnet. God can't do that. But we can co-author with God a poem called *poesis,* creation, the so-called 'real' world. That's a different kind of poem, where God and the human meet each other, complement each other. But either can withdraw from the dance, in which case the other just falls on his or her face. That's the end of it. We can destroy God. That's why I speak of a God who *may be,* which is an interpretation of the Hebrew 'I am the God who will be, who may be'. [Exodus 3.14] If I am the God who simply *am,* I am already accomplished, already there, whereas the God who *may be* is *also* a God of promise, of potential, of the kingdom. At any point we can pull the plug on God. As one of the victims of the Holocaust, Etty Hillesum says: 'We must help God to be God.'[9] And that's where we can make a link with people like Eckhart and Cusanus and some of the other Church Fathers and biblical prophets.

MM: At first glance the notion that 'We must help God to be God' sounds arrogant?

RK: Yes, but what it's accepting is that *God is not arrogant;* that God does not presume to be able to stop evil. God can't stop evil. Why? Because evil is the absence of God. God has no power over what God is not – namely evil. God can only be good – unconditionally good in gifting, loving, creating. That is where the Gnostics and theodicists were wrong: God is not *both* good *and* evil. Even Hegel and Jung made that mistake. God is *not* omnipotent when it comes to evil. God is utterly powerless.

9 Etty Hillesum, a Nazi victim, writes: 'You (God) cannot help us, but we must help you and defend Your dwelling place inside us to the last.' *An Interrupted Life* (New York: Owl Books, 1996), 176; cited in Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 2.

And that's terribly important. You find that in the Christian story: Jesus before Pilate, the crucifixion: he couldn't do anything. It's 'the power of the powerless' as Vaclav Havel calls it – and he is right.[10] God helps us to be more fully human; we help God to be more fully God – or we don't. If we don't, we can blow up the world and that's the end of humanity, and that's the end of God as the promise of the kingdom because there's nobody there any more to fulfill the promise. In that instance, God remains as pure *desiring,* of course, as pure *poeticizing* – except God's world has just been broken up by God's own creature. And to revisit the terms of *The God Who May Be,* God remains *transfiguring;* but there's nothing left to transfigure any more because we've destroyed it.

MM: You also mention the 'possibilizing God'?

RK: Basically, that means that divinity is a constant offer of the possibility of the kingdom which can be interpreted in two ways (and you find this in the scriptures). One is the kingdom as eschatological promise after history, at the *end* of history. The other is the kingdom *now:* in the mustard seed, in the little, everyday, most insignificant of acts. The kingdom is present in the 'feast of these'. Just as Christ is present in the giving of a cup of cold water. That means that in every moment there is the possibility of good and there is the possibility of non-good. There's the possibility of love; there's the possibility of hate, violence, aggression. We're choosing constantly. And every moment we are actualizing the kingdom or not-actualizing the kingdom. As Benjamin says so beautifully: 'Every moment is a portal through which the Messiah might come.'[11] Now, what we've got to get away from is thinking that the Messiah comes and then it's all over. If you're a Christian – and I am up to a point: I am a Christian up to the point where the love of 'Christians' offends justice and then I'm not 'Christian' any more – you draw from the

10 Vaclav Havel and others, *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*, ed. John Keane, intro. Steven Lukes (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1985).

11 This reference (roughly translated by Kearney) occurs in Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History' (a.k.a. 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'). For an English translation of this text, refer to the home page of Lloyd Spencer on the Trinity and All Saints (College) website, Leeds <http://www.tasc.ac.uk/depart/media/staff/ls/WBenjamin/CONCEPT2.html>, February 3, 2004.

Christian story and testimony the notion that *each little act* makes a difference. For example, the woman with the hemorrhage: you help her – you don't want to but you help her. [Matthew 9.19-23; Luke 8.43-48] There's no wine: okay, we reluctantly change the wine. [John 2.1-11] And so on and so forth. You do all of these little things – most of them almost imperceptible – and you don't make a big fuss about it. And when the Messiah comes – even if this happens to be a pretty extraordinary, exemplary instance of the divine in the human – as I believe Christ is – you don't say: 'Now it's all over.' You *can* say: 'Now it's all over for me.' But history isn't over. The coming of Christ *wasn't* the end of the world: the Messiah always comes again in history. And the Messiah is always – including the Christian Messiah – a God who is *still* to come (even when the Messiah has already come). The Messiah is one who has already come and is always still to come. And that's why I see the Christian story as exemplary. (But it's not the only story in town. And, in my view, it has no absolute prerogative vis-à-vis other world religions. God speaks in many voices and in many traditions). But to return to the Bible, I could take the Mosaic story as well: in the burning bush God came. With Elijah in the cave, the Messiah came. But that wasn't the end of it. The Messiah came to John the Baptist too, the voice crying in the wilderness. It always comes *and* goes. And that's the nature of the Messiah: it's already here – the kingdom is already here – but it is also not yet fully here. And it's this double moment that's terribly important because the possible is not just *the Possible:* the telos of universal history coming to an end at the end of time – that's Hegel. That's triumphalism. That's the kind of monotheistic tyranny that leads to religious wars: 'We own The Promised Land'; '*This* and only *this* is the Absolute'; all or nothing. In contrast to such triumphalist teleologies and ideologies of power, the divine possible I am speaking of comes in tiny, almost imperceptible acts of love or poetic justice. It is in 'the music of what happens' as Seamus Heaney says. Or in what Joyce called 'epiphanies', Baudelaire 'correspondences', Proust 'reminiscences'. These are all poetic testimonies to the possible that becomes incarnate in all these little moments of eschatological enfleshment.

MM: What does 'eschatology' mean for you?

RK: If and when the kingdom comes, I believe it will be a great kind of 'recollection' or 'retrieval' (*anakephalaiosis* is the term used by Paul) of all those special moments of love. But you can't even see it in terms of past, present, and future because the eternal or emblematic is outside time, even though it comes *into* time all the time. Christ is just an exemplary figure of it. What does Christ say at the end? He says: 'Time for me to go. Don't touch me. *Noli me tangere.* [John 20.17] Don't possess me. I cannot be an idol that you possess.' The Messiah is deferred. And here I always draw great sustenance from Blanchot's tale of the beggar waiting for the Messiah at the gates of Rome. The Messiah comes and the beggar goes up to him and says: 'Are you the Messiah?' And the Messiah responds: 'Yes.' And the beggar asks: 'When will you come?' because the Messiah is always still to come. The Messiah is *still to come* even as the Messiah is *there.* Because we're temporal we're confronted with this unsolvable paradox or aporia: namely, that the kingdom has already come and yet is not here. And that's the way it is for our finite phenomenological minds. And no metaphysics and no theology or philosophy can resolve that one. So, to the extent that deconstruction is a reminder of the *impossibility* of ever having the total take on God as absolute, then I'm for deconstruction. But as an endless kind of 'soft shoe shuffle' of infinite qualifications and refinements, forever declining any kind of incarnation, I find deconstruction too deserted, too *désertique,* too desert-like, too hard. Derrida's deconstruction is too inconsolable. It's overly uncompromising. Too puritanical – in a way, strangely. It's all about the impossible. But for me, God is the possibilizing of the impossible. 'What is impossible to us is possible to God.' [Matthew 10.27, 19.26; Luke 18.27] We actualize what God possibilizes and God possibilizes what remains impossible for us. To sum up: 'God is giving' means God is poeticizing, possibilizing, transfiguring, and desiring. That's my *religious* phenomenology of the gift. I also did a *pre-religious* phenomenology of the gift in the first part of *Poétique du Possible* published in 1984.[12] And if I were to do that again I would certainly include readings of Proust and Joyce or just everyday testimonies to people's kindness, the small ways in which love and creativity work in the world – irrespective of whether people are religious or not. You can go either way.

12 Richard Kearney, *Poétique du Possible. Phénoménologie Herméneutique de la Figuration* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984).

MM: You've answered the question of a 'theology of gift' in terms of thinking God as gift. To think creation as gift: briefly, what would that entail for you?

RK: If we're talking about divine creation – because I think there's two creations going on: divine and human – I don't want to repeat myself but I would probably go back to the idea of *poesis*: God as *poesis*, the *nous poetikos* as Aristotle calls it, and the *possest* as Cusanus says. Poeticizing is the act of constantly opening horizons of possibility, gifts of possibility, for human beings to realize. The divine gift as creation is powerless to impose that gift on somebody who doesn't want it because that would not be good: that would be evil. If you say to somebody: 'I love you' and they say: 'I don't want your love' and you say: 'Sorry, I love you, and whether you like it or not, you are going to be transfigured by my love.' That's coercion, violence, tyranny. That's what so-called benevolent dictators do. That's the imposition of the good on somebody who doesn't want it. Sadism in the name of God. How many times has religion done that? The Taliban were doing it. The Inquisition was doing it. The New England Puritans were doing it to the so-called 'witches' down in Salem. 'For your good, we are going to impose the good!' 'But thank you very much, I don't want your good.' That's why God loves rebels: God loves the Steven Daedeluses of this world who say: 'I will not serve that in which I no longer believe' whether it call itself religion, language, or homeland. (It's at the beginning of Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist.*)[13] I suspect that God would prefer people not to serve that in which they do not believe. God prefers honest people who rebel rather than the lackeys, the 'creeping Jesuses who would do anything to please us' (Blake). I don't want to get into a cult of the rebel here. But God admires people like Job and David – who argue with God. God admires Jesus on the cross who says: 'Why have you forsaken me? Come on, give me an answer to this.' God likes that.

MM: In 'Desiring God', you mention, quite prophetically: 'there is a growing problem of closure to the other. I am sure, if it has not already become a problem here in the United States, it will become one – the problem of how one can relate openly and hospitably and justly to the other, without demonization.'[14] These words obviously resonate in light of the current wave of terrorism. However, let's ask this question from an ecocentric perspective: do you have any thoughts on how one can or should relate openly and hospitably and justly to the non-human other – animate and inanimate? We demonize the non-human –

RK: We demonize all the time. When people want to show what the devil is they usually take an animal. Just look at medieval and Renaissance portraits of demons. The iconography of *The Last Judgment* is full of this: goats, bats, snakes, dragons, griffins, dogs, gargoyles. I think that's a real question. I think it's something we in western philosophy and in our excessive anthropocentrism have sometimes ignored, that is, the *alterity* of nature: of trees and of animals, and so on. One thing I've taken great courage and guidance from is my own children's sensitivity in this regard. They are vegetarians and very opposed to wearing fur coats or buying factory-produced food. I think there's a growing awareness in the new generation which is very important as long as it's kept in balance with being good to your neighbor who's starving down the street (and perhaps can only afford factory food). I find there are many young people in Boston or New York who go down to protest against Bush or the death penalty as much as they will concern themselves with cruelty to animals and the pollution of nature. That's good. The balance is important. There's no point ignoring social and human issues out of some kind of obsession with eating 'natural' food. That's just taking food as a surrogate symbol that can be 'purified' as the world disintegrates before the ravages of global poverty and capitalism. There can sometimes be – for example, a certain New England obsession with health and the natural – a demonization of smoking, a demonization of alcohol, a demonization of sex (although it often goes hand-in-hand with fantasy sex or subworld sex in Las Vegas and Hollywood, so it can be very ambiguous). There is a residual *puritanism* in American culture, I think, and a certain demonization of the pagan earthiness of things. That may include food prohibitions against eating fish or 'killing' tomatoes, etc., as well as in the stringent laws against smoking, drinking, or sexual language. But

13 James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. and intro. Harold Bloom (Broomall: Chelsea House, 1999).

14 Kearney, 'Desire of God', in Caputo and Scanlon, *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, 112-145, 135 [henceforth Kearney, 'Desire of God'].

that's only *half* the story – the *official* version as it were. The other half is very different, and leads to all kinds of perversions, double-think and double-talk. It's a messy world, full of double messages. I'm not saying, therefore, that you should tolerate cruelty to animals and indiscriminately chop down trees. I'm saying you do your best, wherever possible and within the limits of the possible, to remain human while doing the *least* amount of harm to nature or to animals or to your fellow human being. But to pretend that you can enter into some realm of pure consumption where everything is as 'organic' as in *Bread and Circuses* food markets is to ignore the fact that *Bread and Circuses* can only exist for the wealthy who pay twice as much for their fish and vegetables while the poor have to go to *Star Market* (a bottom-end supermarket chain) and buy factory-produced food. I approve of going to *Bread and Circuses* – I just wish it were available to everybody. Somewhere along the line, the refusal of smoke, sex, alcohol, and meat in an *absolutist* fashion can, to my mind, smack of residual puritanism. It can slip into demonization even with the very best of intentions – and I'm always wary of that. So I would say: 'Be vegetarian. Fine. But when you find yourself in a situation where you go to another country and there's only meat on the table, have some meat.' If I go to a tribe in Africa and they give me goats' eyeballs, I may not particularly like it, but I'm not going to offend my host by saying: 'I don't eat goats' eyeballs!' I'll eat it – raw or cooked. That's the kind thing to do. That's accepting the hospitality of the other as other. Or as the Dalai Lama advised his monks: 'eat whatever is dropped into your begging bowl.'

MM: In *The God Who May Be,* you open up the question of discernment, whether we're facing saturation or the desert. You claim that: 'For the theist Marion, no less than for the atheist Derrida, we are left with the dilemma of 'holy madness', how to judge between true and false prophets, between good and evil ghosts, between holy and unholy messiahs.'[15] Even though Caputo and Derrida are suspicious of criteria – I guess we all are a little suspicious – how should we nevertheless judge between the true and the false, the good and the evil? After Derrida, how do you treat criteria?

15 Kearney, 'Desire of God', 140, n. 43.

RK: You do so by trying to discern and judge more carefully, more cautiously, more critically. And I would say more hermeneutically. You don't have to get rid of criteria altogether. Derrida would say: 'Well, of course we have to make decisions all the time. We judge and we use criteria. We have to do that: we couldn't not do it.' Strictly speaking, that's already a compromise. That's already entering into the economy of things. And I just find the gap between our decisions and undecidability too polar. That's my problem: it's too antithetical, too aporetical, too impossible. Decisions are 'too difficult' in the deconstructive scenario. They are all made in 'fear and trembling' because we're 'in the dark'! At the 1999 Villanova exchange, I asked Derrida: 'How can you read in the dark?' He said: 'We can *only* read in the dark.' But I want to turn the light on! Even if it's only a flashlight – that will remove a little of the darkness and confusion. I don't believe in *absolute* light or total enlightenment for us ordinary mortals. It doesn't have to be either absolute light or total darkness. It doesn't have to be that hard. We're not all desperate Desert Fathers waiting for Godot as the apocalyptic dusk descends! It doesn't have to be that angst-ridden or melodramatic. The world is a place of light and dark: we always have a bit of both.

MM: Derrida might say that the world is in such a mess because we assume we can read in the light and that all decisions are easy.

RK: I can understand what he's saying in terms of an excessive *hubris* and arrogance on behalf of a certain Enlightenment, on behalf of rationalism, on behalf of science and technology. There I agree with him. But I'm not sure that's the way most people in the world today actually think or live. Most people are confused and bewildered. They're not cock-sure *cogitos* in need of deconstruction but wounded, insecure, fragile subjects in search of meaning.

MM: What about religious dogmatism?

RK: Oh, before the Enlightenment it was worse. What I'm saying is: to think you possess the light and everybody else is in darkness is a recipe for imperialism, colonization, injustice, holy war, *jihad,* 'Good versus Evil'. We're witnessing it again today. Nobody has a prerogative on light or the good. But that doesn't mean we're all condemned to a kind of total

darkness, *khôra,* undecidability. I think everything should be deconstructed; but the question for me is: what's it like *after* deconstruction? That's why I still believe in hermeneutics. Derrida doesn't. I believe in reminiscences, resurrections, reconciliations. They're all temporary, they're all provisional, they're all muddling through. Granted – but they do happen. I believe in paths. Not massive metaphysical viaducts or Golden Gate Bridges between the contingent and the absolute, but I do believe in little footbridges – the kind you get in Harrison Ford movies. Hermeneutic bridges, connections, ladders. I find that deconstruction follows the template of the Lazarus parable: the implacable metaphor of the gulf that (a) separates paradise, the Absolute, the impossible from (b) the land of the living – our finite, everyday, contingent, mortal world. The deconstructive gulf radically segregates the two. There's an unbridgeable gap between the divine and the human, the impossible and the possible. The deconstructionist Abraham won't allow Lazarus to send a message back to his brothers to warn and instruct them. It is too late. The kind of hermeneutics of religion that I'm talking about, by contrast, would be much more guided by the paradigm of Jacob's ladder, where there's *to-ing* and *fro-ing,* lots of people going up and down, in both directions. No *absolute* descent or *absolute* ascent. It's little people going up and down ladders. And that, to me, is how you work towards the kingdom. 'Every step you take ...' (as the song goes). Each step counts. Messianic incursion, incarnation, epiphany is a possibility for every moment of our lives. But because we are finite and temporal, the infinite can pass through time, but it can never remain or take up residence in some absolute or permanent present. That's the difference between the eternal and time. They can criss-cross back and forth, up and down, like the angels on Jacob's ladder. But they are never identical, never the same. That's what a hermeneutic affirmation of *difference* is all about – as opposed to deconstructive *différance* – which, in my view, gives up hope in the *real possibility* of mediation and transition.

MM: One more question generated by 'Desiring God'. Whereas someone like Marion may turn to mystical theology and a phenomenology of saturation, I concur with you in your affirmation of 'hermeneutical retrievals and re-imaginings of biblical narratives and stories'.[16] Could you briefly

16 Kearney, 'Desire of God', 139, n. 43.

comment on the possible nature or direction of these retrievals and re-maginings? And could you perhaps suggest how such retrievals could nform – and be informed by – a philosophical theology of gift/ing? For Kevin Hart and Jean-Luc Marion and others, they draw from mystical heology, but they seem to be turning away from biblical resources.

RK: That's why I'm into the hermeneutics of narrative imagination, whereas they're into a more deconstructionist position (yes, even Marion in my view) – and there *is* a difference in that regard. So while I learn from deconstruction, I really am closer to hermeneutics – I try to negotiate between the two, but I'm closer to hermeneutics – what I call a 'diacritical hermeneutics'. It's not the romantic hermeneutics of Gadamer and Heidegger and Schleiermacher: getting back to the original event and reappropriating the inaugural moment. I don't believe in that kind of hermeneutic retrieval of the original and the originary – some primal unity. Nor would I uncritically endorse what Jack Caputo calls 'radical hermeneutics' – which is really another word for deconstruction – because it doesn't sufficiently allow, in my view, for valid retrievals, recognitions, or reconciliations. In *Strangers, Gods and Monsters,* I propose a diacritical hermeneutics which is a third way.[17] I propose mediations, connections, inter-links and passages back and forth. So it's neither reappropriation and fusion of horizons *à la* Gadamer, nor is it a complete gulf, separation, or rupture *à la* Caputo, Lyotard, and Derrida. Diacritical hermeneutics holds that faith is helped by narratives. Now I don't privilege in any exclusivist sense the Christian narratives over the Jewish or the Islamic or indeed the non-monotheistic. I just say: 'They're the ones I know best.' If I was a Muslim, I'd work with Muslim narratives. If I was Jewish, I'd work with Jewish texts. (Indeed, as a Christian, I generally work with both Christian *and* Jewish narratives.) My niece has become a Buddhist: I learn from Buddhist stories and I try to include them in my work. I still do it from a Christian perspective because that's what I'm most familiar with. But if I'd grown up in Kyoto, I would invoke the Buddhist texts first. I don't believe that any religion has an absolute right to the Absolute. There is no one, Royal Route. There should be no proprietal prerogatives here. They're all narrative paths towards the Absolute. And if you happen to be born on this particular road

17 Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* (London: Routledge, 2002).

or highway rather than another one, and you've walked it for twenty or thirty years, then you know it better than another one, and you can help other people walk it. And from your knowledge of it, when you come to a crossroads, you may have more interesting and intelligent dialogue with the person who has come along the other highway. You know where you've come from and you can talk to them about it. They can learn from you and you can learn from them. Whereas if you say immediately: 'Oh well, to hell with my highway! I'm only interested in yours' they might well respond: 'Well, I'll tell you about mine, but do you have anything to add to the conversation?' And you'll say: 'No, no! I hate everything about my road! I've learnt nothing. That's only a load of baloney!' I'm always a bit suspicious of zealous converts who repudiate everything in their own traditions and look to some New Age trendy alternative for a solution – and that can be a Buddhist becoming a Christian as much as a Christian becoming a Buddhist. I'm all for dialogue between the two. Some people have to change their religions to shake off the tyranny of their tradition. Their experience may be *so* negative that they *need* to do that. And here you can have a kind of religious or cultural transvestism that is very helpful: you wear the clothes of another religion and through it you can see the spiritual in a way which you couldn't have done previously. I'm not against conversion as such, unless it's from one absolutist disposition to another absolutist disposition. I don't think any religion should be absolutist. I think it should be *searching for* the Absolute but the *search itself* should not be absolutist because that's to presume we can own the Absolute. Where I am wary of a certain mystical New Ageism or deconstructionism is their tendency to repudiate historical narratives and memories as invariably compromising and totalizing. I see narratives and memories as necessary mediations. If you don't go down the route of hermeneutic re-interpretation – which is a long route, as Ricoeur says, an arduous labor of reading and rereading, then you must go towards the desert like Derrida and Caputo and their ana-khorites. Which is hard. Or else you go towards the opposite, mystical extreme – not towards *khôra* this time (with Derrida and Caputo) but towards the 'saturated phenomenon' or hyperessential divinity (with Marion or Michel Henry).[18] But then it's another kind of "holy terror",

18 Like Jean-Luc Marion, Michel Henry is a French phenomenologist with theological leanings. Refer to Marion's essay 'The Saturated Phenomenon', and Henry's

because you're completely *blinded* by it. You embrace another kind of 'dark' (from over-exposure to the Absolute in the dark night of the soul). Here, too, it seems to me, there is no interpretation possible. It's immediate, non-mediated presence. In both cases – whether you're going into the emptiness and undecidability of the *khôra* or whether you're going into the blinding over-exposed splendor of divine saturation – you are subjected to an experience of 'holy madness'. Now, I'm not against that *as a moment.* But you can't live with the moment: you've got to interpret it after the event. Otherwise, what's the difference between Moses and the burning bush and Peter Sutcliffe [the 'Yorkshire Ripper'] in his pick-up truck claiming he's illuminated and hearing a so-called divine voice that says: 'Go and kill prostitutes and do my will and clear the world of this evil scourge'? What's the difference? There *must* be a difference. And we must try to discern as best we can between (a) psychopaths like Charlie Manson or Peter Sutcliffe, who think they're on a *divine* mission to kill in the name of God; and, (b) prophets like Moses or Isaiah, who go out to liberate and comfort their enslaved people. You have to be able to *even vaguely* and *approximately* tell the difference. No?

MM: So we return to the problem of Abraham sacrificing his son?

RK: Yes, but my reading of this episode is very different to Kierkegaard's and closer to Lévinas's. The way to read that, I suggest, involves a critical hermeneutic retrieval. The story illustrates how monotheistic revelation is anti-sacrifice; it marks a move away from human sacrifice. This may be read, accordingly, as a story about the transition from pre-revelation to revelation monotheism. The first voice that Abraham hears – 'Kill your son' – is, by this account, his *own voice.* It's the voice of his ancestral, tribal, sacrificial religion. But the second voice that says, 'Do *not* kill your son', is the voice of the kingdom. That's how I read it. I think we should read every story in the Gospel according to the principle: 'where is justice being preached here and where is injustice?' Where there's evil, you have to say no to it. You can find other passages in the

essay 'Speech and Religion: The Word of God', in *Phenomenology and the 'Theological Turn': The French Debate*, Dominique Janicaud and others (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 176-216, 217-42 [henceforth Janicaud and others, *Phenomenology and the 'Theological Turn'*].

Bible that say: 'Go out and kill all Gentiles or Canaanites.' If you take that literally you're into the Palestinian/Israeli situation. You are into 'Holy War'. Ditto for the Christian invocation of a 'blood libel' against Jews. We should read such texts hermeneutically, critically, and say: 'No! That was an interpolation by certain zealous scribes during a certain century ...' We need historical research on this. We need to demythologize it and say: They were trying to justify the occupation of their neighbors' lands. So ignore that mispresentation of divine revelation and look rather to the Psalms where God calls for the protection of the widow, the stranger, and the orphan. The stranger is your neighbor – *that's* God speaking. 'Go out and kill Canaanites' is *not* God speaking – that's *us* speaking. Knowing the difference is a matter of hermeneutic discernment. And it's a matter which concerns every believer, every reader of scripture.

MM: Nietzsche asks 'Can there be a God beyond good and evil?'[19] Maybe we're just projecting our idea that God is 'simply good'; that God can only do 'purely good things'?

RK: Everyone makes their choice, but the God of love and justice is the only God I'm interested in. I'm not interested in the God of evil, torture, and sadism. I'm just not interested in those Gnostic (or neo-Gnostic) notions that see the dark side of God – destruction and holocaust – as an indispensable counterpart to the good side. Such theories or theodicies can justify *anything.*

MM: But there is that possibility?

RK: There *isn't* that possibility – for me, or at least it is one I refuse. It's how you interpret it. You can, of course, interpret divinity in terms of a moralizing God where you say: 'Oh, homosexuality, masturbation, divorce, sex outside of marriage, etc. is evil.' That's the Christian Coalition, Pat Buchanan, Ian Paisley – they seem to know what's good for all of us! I'm against such a *moralizing* God but I'm not against an *ethical* God. There's a big difference. I *don't know* what the absolutely

19 In § 55 of *The Will to Power,* Nietzsche asks: 'Does it make sense to conceive a god 'beyond good and evil'?' Refer to Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power,* trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 36 [henceforth Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*].

good is. How could anyone know? But I do *believe* – precisely because I can't know – the good exists and I will do everything to try to differentiate and discern (according to what Ignatius calls 'the discernment of spirits') as best I can between the God of love and the pseudo-God of hate. I do believe that the divine is the good. In fact, for me, 'God' is another name for 'the good' rather than 'the good' being another name for God. We don't know what the good is. We don't know what God is either. But they *must* be the same because if they're not, there's no way to avoid theodicy and its ruinous logic: 'This war was necessary. It's all part of the will of God. It's the necessary dark side to God.' Jung's answer to Job. Pangloss's answer to the Lisbon earthquake.[20] Hegel's answer to the Terror. The rise of Divine Reason run amok. As humans, I agree, we have to confront the *thanatos,* the shadow in ourselves, the sadistic instincts, the perversions, the hate, the evil, the aggression. *We* have to confront the shadow in ourselves. But divinity doesn't have to confront the shadow in itself – because if it has evil in itself it is not God. If you say 'The shadow in God – the sacrifice of innocent children, the torture of victims – is part of God's will' well, frankly, I'd prefer to burn in hell than believe in a God who justifies the torture of innocent children. And I'm not ambiguous about that. That said, I take a very dramatic example here that very few people would say is good because, on many occasions, it's very hard to tell what's absolutely good or evil. It is very hard for people to justify the torture of an innocent child. Should the Americans have dropped the atomic bomb in Hiroshima? I would say 'No', but I'm not going to be too moralistic about that because I know there's an argument. You can negotiate that. Should a woman have an abortion? I would say: 'Ideally not, but it's her right, and if she believes she is doing what she thinks is right, on balance, it may be the right thing for her to do.' So I think a law that says 'You can never have an abortion' is wrong. Abortion is very complex. It can be right in some respects, and wrong in others – *at the same time.* It may be right *and* wrong. Morality is often grey on grey; it's not black and white. Let's just say it is morally difficult. And everyone – for or against – has a right to discuss it. That's what human morality is. It's not about absolutes. But when it

20 Pangloss is a character in Voltaire's *Candide,* ed. trans. and intro. Daniel Gordon (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999), who rationalizes the leveling of Lisbon by an earthquake and tidal wave.

comes to God, who is absolute, either God is good or I'm not interested in God. This mixing evil with God is Gnosticism. I wrote my second novel, *Walking at Sea Level,* as an argument against that.[21]

MM: There are all these other metaphysical characteristics ascribed to God: God is one, God is pure, and so on, and to say, 'God is purely good' –

RK: Well, I'm not sure I would use the word 'purely' here because then you're back into puritanism. But I do insist on the claim that God is unconditionally and absolutely good or God is not God. I would not claim that I know what the good is. I would simply *try* to discern better between what is good and what is evil, or what is better and what is worse, what is more or less just in a *given* situation. I can recognize many instances of good acts where people put others before themselves and give up their life or give up their wealth – that, to me, is a good thing to do. I want to reserve the right to say that. Whereas when somebody chops a child's head off, I want to be able to say: 'That's *not* a good thing.' I think most people would agree. That's not an absolutist disposition: it is common sense, practical wisdom, what the Greeks called *phronesis,* the Latins *prudentia.* Whenever someone does a good act – gives a cup of cold water to a parched neighbor – he or she is making God that little bit *more* real and actual and incarnate in the world. When someone does evil – torturing innocent children or simply stealing the cup of cold water from the parched neighbor who needs it more – he or she is refusing the possibilizing, desiring, transfiguring promise of God. In that sense, evil is the refusal to let God exist.

MM: In your legendary 1984 interview with Derrida, he explains that there have always been 'heterogeneous elements' in Christianity.[22] Was he referring to scriptural motifs or mystical theology? Or both?

21 Richard Kearney, *Walking at Sea Level* (London: Hodder, 1997).

22 Richard Kearney asks Derrida the following question in his interview with him in *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*, 116-17: 'But did not Judaism and Christianity represent a heterogeneity, an 'otherness' before they were assimilated into Greek culture?' To which Derrida replies: 'Of course. And one can argue that these original, heterogeneous elements of Judaism and Christianity were never completely eradicated by Western metaphysics. They perdure throughout the centuries, threatening and unsettling the assured 'identities' of Western philosophy... .'

RK: I don't know. You'd have to ask him. But I suspect that what he means by that is probably similar to what I've just been saying. There's no one pure religion. Christianity is heterogeneous. It draws from pagan elements, Jewish elements, Greek elements, etc.

MM: The context was Greek philosophy or metaphysics, mainstream Christianity, and you referred to the official dogmas of the dominant churches, and then Derrida said: 'Oh, no, I can see that there are heterogeneous elements.' But I didn't know if he meant 'biblical theology' and/or some of the mystical texts.

RK: Generally speaking, when Derrida says 'There are heterogeneous elements' that's good news from his point of view. So I think he just wants to say: 'Look, as I would interpret it, Christianity isn't just this triumphalist, totalizing, dogmatic, absolutist, intolerant body of beliefs. It's actually quite porous and permeable to dialogue with its other.' And I would agree wholeheartedly with him here.

MM: And there are marginal voices.

RK: Exactly.

MM: Having cited that line, do you think Derrida prefers the biblical over the mystical?

RK: It depends how you define 'the biblical' and 'the mystical'. There are elements of the mystical in Derrida. He is very taken, for example, by Pseudo-Dionysius, Eckhart, Silesius, Cusanus. But I think there are other forms of mysticism that Derrida would not have much time for: particularly the fusional and somewhat hysterical claim to be 'one with God'.

MM: I haven't read many mystical theologians, but most of them say we can't speak about God and then –

RK: They go and speak about God.

MM: Yes, and affirm all the dogmas and say 'God is definitely Trinitarian', 'God is this' and 'God is that' and they just seem to slide back into this totalizing discourse.

RK: Then they're not really good mystics, I would say.

MM: Wouldn't mystical theology – taken to its logical or a/logical conclusion – have to say: 'I'm going to suspend my beliefs on, say, the creeds of the churches, because the creeds are as positive as you can get'? I was just wondering how the mystics can balance their mysticism with their denominational affirmations. Dionysius wasn't considered a heretic.

RK: Most of them were. Eckhart was. John Scotus Eriugena was. Bruno and Vico were. They were in favor one moment, out the next. These thinkers were trying to make sense to their fellow believers. They had had these deep, spiritual experiences and were profoundly touched and were trying to reconcile these experiences with the doctrine of the Virgin Birth or the Filioque or something like that. They were mucking along. They were trying to be loved and accepted by their brethren in the monastery. Otherwise they were out in the rain with no food. We compromise and we muddle through. I would say here, again, that Derrida often discriminates: he picks and chooses – and rightly so. He's an *à la carte* rabbinical interpreter. Just think of his reflections on biblical passages in *Schibboleth* or 'Circumfession', for example.[23] Or again in *Donner la mort* (*The Gift of Death*) where Derrida goes back to the Abraham story.[24] He takes what inspires him and rejects the kind of Zionist triumphalism which says: 'Death to all Arabs.' So he discriminates. You might say: 'Well, *how* do you discriminate, Mr. Derrida, since there are no criteria and we can only read in the dark?' But that's another day's work. Maybe it's a performative contradiction but, happily, he does exercise it. He discriminates. He differentiates. He discerns. He's on the side of the good. Deconstruction is not a justification for evil. It's not an apologia for an 'anything goes' relativism – as some of its critics unconditionally suggest.

MM: In the end, deconstruction is just trying to affirm that whatever is going on in the world –

RK: No, that's Heidegger. Derrida, as I understand him, is saying: 'I'm for justice. I'm for the gift. I'm for the good. I'm for the democracy to come.' He's not saying: 'It doesn't matter whether it's democracy or totalitarianism. It doesn't matter whether it's justice or injustice. It doesn't matter whether it's gift or selfishness.' He's not saying that at all. Derrida is on the side of the good. All his thinking, politically and ethically, is emancipatory. The differences I have with Derrida are not in terms of his values, his ethics, his politics – but how one gets there. That's a practical question, a pragmatic question. I think hermeneutics, *informed by* a certain deconstructive caution, vigilance and scrupulosity, is a better way of getting there than deconstruction on its own (without hermeneutics). That's where I part company with Caputo, Derrida and Lyotard. But they're all on the side of the good as I see it. I'm not saying: 'We're all morally pure.' I'm saying that the good is something we aspire to, something that is impossible, something that is 'impossible' in its *absolute* sense but possible in all kinds of different tiny practical ways. The messianic is potentially present in every moment, even though we can never be sure whether it comes or goes.

23 Refer to Jacques Derrida, 'Shibboleth' in *Midrash and Literature*, ed. and trans. Geoffrey Hartman and Sanford Budick (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 307-347; 'Circumfession: Fifty-nine Periods and Periphrases) appears in Jacques Derrida and Geoffrey Bennington, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

24 Derrida's essay 'Donner la mort' appears in the book *L'Ethique du don: Jacques Derrida et la pensée du don*, eds. Jean-Michel Rabaté and Michael Wetzel (Paris: Métailié-Transition, 1992). (The English version is *The Gift of Death*.)